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DONIZETTI:

HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

BY M. DE THÉMINES.

Translated for the ART JOURNAL from the French,

BY MARGARET CECILIA CLEVELAND.

X.

L'Elisir d'amore is the first work in the new style of the master. It is no longer the old Italian *opera bouffe*, neither does it resemble the French *opera comique*. It is the veritable *semi-seria* music, lively, playful, sparkling, *spirituelle*, original, spirited and amusing. It is the true improvisation of the man of genius. No more old forms and cadenzas in *felicita*; no long recitatives with the monotonous and stiff accompaniment of the violoncello. It is musical chatting. All is beautiful in this score, from the first air

of the tenor to the delicate and suave romance for the same voice:

Una furtiva lagrime,

a veritable melodic jewel, which will have many equals in the maestro's sparkling casket.

If the *Barbiere* belongs to the *opera bouffe* of the *Rossinienne* period, it is the *Elisir d'amore* which marks a new era in this eminently-Italian style.

As *Anna Bolena* had placed Donizetti in the rank of maestro for the grand opera, the *Elisir d'amore* assigned him a no less elevated place in the light opera. And certainly, after the *Barbiere*, *Cenerentola*, *L'Italiana in Algieri*, etc., Rossini having ceased to compose, no work will be found which could have maintained in Italy the honor of this particular kind of music, which is not the French *opera comique*, and which is not exactly the *opera bouffe*. This style having risen with the old masters of the art, the Paisiellos, the Cimarosas, then with Rossini, as high as it could, it was necessary to carry it still higher, at least not let it fall back; to uphold it, to retemper it. This is what Donizetti did with the *Elisir d'amore*.

From the date of this success we only meet with works worthy of surviving him, and which have outlived him. The genius of the musician had asserted itself. There will be found here and there some defects, excusable, however, in one who has written such a host of imperishable works.

For example, *Sancia di Castiglia*, which immediately followed the grand success of the *Elisir*, and which he gave at Naples, is without doubt a remarkable opera, abounding in melody; the cavatina for the soprano is very fine, very beautiful also are the duets between basso and soprano, and between the tenor and contralto, as well as the final scene of the soprano; but the work, as a whole, adds nothing to the reputation of the author. The Neapolitans, however, applauded the *Sancia di Castiglia*, and they are very difficult and severe judges! Donizetti also appeared very well pleased with it, for he dedicated this work to his beloved master, Simon

Mayr. With all this, *Sancia di Castiglia* cannot be counted among the number of his *chef d'œuvres*. What matter! The year 1833 had already commenced; Rome was in need of a new opera, Donizetti was quickly sent for, and the maestro, "always ready," as in the English device, wrote for the Theatre Apollo, *Il Furioso all'isola di San Domingo*, an opera in which the two styles, the grand opera and the opera comique, were mingled without being confounded.

Ronconi then appeared on the theatrical horizon: a handsome, ardent young man, gifted with a barytone voice such as is rarely heard, full of zeal and energy. Ronconi took the role of Cardenio, and filled it with so much success, that it was a long time before they found any one who dare touch it. No one sang like him that delicious romance:

Raggio d'amor pareo;
Sul primo april degli anni.

No one displayed more dramatic talent in the grand final scene of this opera. The success was immense. *Il Furioso* soon made the tour of all the lyrical stages of the Peninsula, which subsisted a long time upon the *Elisir* and this last work.

Florence had not been the last among the Italian cities to appropriate the talent of Donizetti. Until then the capital of Tuscany had only had works of his that had been played at other theatres; she did like Naples, like Milan, like Rome and Venice: she called Donizetti and asked of him an opera, that he should write expressly for the Teatro della Pergola.

Donizetti was at the same time flattered and charmed, for he longed to visit Florence, but he did not wish to go there as a simple tourist; he had not the time to spare. The city of Capponi, of Niccolini, of Leopardi, of Bartolini, gave him the warmest welcome. Donizetti responded to this gracious reception by the *Parisina*, one of the works which deserve to be represented at the present day, and which to my mind, and the opinion of all those who applauded it in its time, is not inferior to *Lucia*.

Donizetti was bound by the ties of friendship to the poet Romani, whom I repeat handled musical verse like no one else. It was of him that Donizetti sought the poem. Romani surpassed himself. *Parisina* is truly a model of the lyrical drama; there are lines in it which are almost music in themselves. I will only mention one Romanza, that of *Parisina* herself:

Forse un destin che infendere,
Dato ai celesti è solo
Quaggiù mi clesse a piangere,
Nascer mi fece al duolo,
Come colomba a genere,
Com'aura a sospirar.
Parmi talor che l'anima
Stacca di tante pene
Anelò a ciel più libero,
Aspirò a ignoto bene
Come favilla all'etere,
Come ruscello al mar.

To translate these lines, almost all the beauty of which consists in the form, the rhythm, notwithstanding all of the delicacy of the conception, would be to disfigure them. It is only music that can in her soft and passionate language do so; and that is what Donizetti took upon himself.

I was not in Florence when Donizetti wrote this work, but I heard it a short time after in Naples. At the San Carlo of Naples the principal rôles of *Parisina* were interpreted by the tenor Duprez (who had just deserted the Grand Opera of Paris), the barytone Coselli, Mme. Unger, one of the most admirable

dramatic cantatrices that I have known in and Italy, the basso Porto. The success was complete.

What a magnificent score is that of *Parisina*! Aside from some slight vulgarisms which have only been discovered by time, for at the period which we speak of, dramatic music, later so well understood by Verdi, had not changed the taste of the public,—aside, I remark, from the light vulgarisms which exist in some of the choruses and in some *cabalette*,—in the *stretta* of the duo between the soprano and barytone, for example, the opera is admirable from one end to the other.

The work well merits the time for analyzing, but to do so I should be obliged to neglect two or three operas that he wrote immediately after the *Parisina*. Let us, then, follow the master. He does not even leave us the time to admire him.

[From the Home Journal.]

KARL RACH'S VIOLIN.

A MUSICAL FANCY.

BY GEORGE W. WANNEMACKER.

[CONCLUDED.]

All day long both Mina and he were kept in a perfect fever of excitement. They could neither think nor speak of anything besides the splendid jewel and the good fortune it would bring; they speculated as to the manner in which Guiciola the magnificent would receive them, and as to what reward she would bestow. Even a fourth of that which had been advertised seemed to their simple minds quite a fortune, and they laid plans without number for enjoying it and investing it to the best advantage. The diamond had lighted up their whole future with its brilliancy, and thus the entire day was passed in bright and hopeful dreams.

THEMA.

[MODERATO—POCO A POCO. FORZANDO. MOLLE.]

The hour appointed by Karl at length drew near, and, placing the violin under his arm, he again proceeded on his way to the *prima donna's* rooms, taking Mina with him. Near the end of their walk he pointed out to her a quiet German restaurant where he proposed, as they came home, to celebrate her happy arrival, and the good fortune which had followed it, over a half-bottle of wine and a little supper. Not far from this neighborhood, he missed the head of the violin, and after searching in vain through every pocket, remembered that he had left it upon his work-bench. Having no time to go back for it, he kept on, and arriving at the great house in which Guiciola resided, learned that she had returned somewhat earlier than had been anticipated, but being obliged to fill an important engagement elsewhere, was temporarily absent. Meanwhile, she had left strict orders that he should remain and await her return, which would not be delayed more than an hour beyond the time he had named.

This gave Karl an opportunity to go back for the forgotten head. The violin he left with Mina, who remained behind. After sitting alone for some time in the large cool hall, she grew weary of the monotony, which in the excited state of her nerves, seemed insupportable. Rising to examine a *statuette*

on a bracket opposite her chair, her attention was attracted by a half-open door, which afforded a fair view of an adjacent room. The innocent girl was dazzled by the splendid appointments and magnificent luxury of the apartment. The rays of the setting sun, streaming in through an open bay window, filled the chamber, from velvet floor to frescoed ceiling, with a flood of golden light, which gilded and idealized all that it touched. Mina had never imagined that the world contained anything half so beautiful. Assuring herself that the room was deserted, she crossed the threshold. In spite of its novelty, now that she had recovered from her first astonishment, the refinement and elegance she beheld on every side seemed to her at once natural and familiar. In her secret heart she had longed to live among just such surroundings as these. Her eye resting upon a magnificent grand piano which stood open in a curtained recess, she could not resist the temptation of touching its polished ivory keys, and lightly sounding its rich chords. After a while, scarcely thinking of what she was doing, she began to improvise, timidly at first, and softly, and then striking the notes with bolder hand, springing from chord to chord, until the air trembled beneath its freight of luscious harmonies. She no longer thought of Guiciola, no longer remembered the diamond. Her fingers rippling over the vibrating keys, wandered into a dreamy and fantastic prelude to the best-loved of all her many songs—Beethoven's "Adelaide." All her being had been roused to its highest pitch by the extenuations of the day, and her overwrought feelings demanded an outlet. She sang with a pathos, a power, she had never before known, and then, her heart throbbing with, and overborne by the great passion of the song, she suddenly ceased in the midst of its swelling music, and leaning forward upon the piano, buried her face in her hands and wept convulsively. Why, she could not tell, for there was nothing of sorrow in her tears; her soul was overflowing with tenderness and love; it seemed to her as though she had found the world of happiness and art she had so often seen in her dreams and longed for.

While she was singing, a handsome, stately woman, richly dressed, had entered the room; but seeing Mina, she remained silently by the door until the music ceased, when she advanced, clapping her hands in applause.

"Bravo! bravo!" she cried; "well done, my little songstress. I see that I must look to my laurels, if I would not have you bear them away. Who are you that thus dares to beard the *lionne* in her own den? What a rash little girl you must be, thus to thrust yourself into her very jaws."

This was spoken kindly and merrily; but Mina, in her consternation could not remember a single word of the difficult English tongue she had studied so faithfully. She began in her own language, a confused apology for the liberty she had taken. But the imperious lady, now also speaking in German, interrupted her, and said that no excuses were needed; on the contrary, she was charmed, both with Mina and her song.

"It was a rare treat for me," she continued, "and you must sing for me again. It is not every day that one hears such a pure, fresh voice. But I am keeping you from the purpose of your visit. May I ask what it is, and also the cause of your tears, and I can do anything to wipe them away?"